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PASTORAL LETTER REGARDING
LIST OF CLERGY FROM THE DIOCESE OF LAFAYETTE
WHO HAVE BEEN CREDIBLY ACCUSED OF SEXUAL ABUSE OF A MINOR OR VULNERABLE ADULT
FROM A REVIEW OF PERSONNEL FILES FROM 1918-2019

*"If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples,
and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* (John 8:31a-32)

Dear Faithful of the Diocese of Lafayette, and People of Acadiana:

Peace be with you!

In 1984, the Diocese of Lafayette was plunged into the heart of a terrible darkness when, for the first time, publicly, the Catholic Church was confronted with the harsh reality that men consecrated for God's work had betrayed their sacred trust and were responsible for reprehensible sins and crimes against the innocence of children. The sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults has wrought devastation not only in the Church, but in the larger society as well. The Church's response, especially in those early days, left much to be desired. The people of Acadiana, and the Catholic faithful, including trustworthy clergy, have justly called for greater accountability and transparency.

While the credible allegations regarding many clergy have been made public, I have been asked since I became Bishop of the Diocese of Lafayette in 2016, whether I would consider disclosing the names of all credibly accused clergy. After consultation with laity, clergy and the community at large, I decided, like a growing number of Bishops and Superiors of Religious Orders, to release the names of credibly accused diocesan priests and deacons in so far as that information could be discerned from personnel files.

That task, I have come to learn, was not an easy one. Both the quality and quantity of documentation has varied significantly over the one-hundred (100) year history of the Diocese of Lafayette. In October of 2018, I tasked a trustworthy group of lay leaders to review our files. No document was off limits, including restricted files, and even what years ago was known as the "secret archives." Every accusation of sexual abuse of minors (that is, persons under eighteen years of age) or vulnerable adults was to be identified and presented to the pre-existing Lay Person Review Board. This Board, made of lay professionals representing the fields of law enforcement, psychology, and education, would make a recommendation to me regarding the credibility of each accusation. My promise from the outset was that if previously unknown or unclear allegations were now identified as credible, I would not fail to remove the offending cleric from ministry.

The following definitions have been used to make determinations for the sake of disclosure:

Accused: the person against whom a complaint of sexual abuse is made.

Allegation: an accusation, including an accusation of sexual abuse of a minor or vulnerable adult.

Canon Law: the term used to describe the laws of the Roman Catholic Church.

Cleric: one who is constituted in sacred ministry in the Church; clerics are divided into deacons, priests and bishops.

Credible Accusation: reason to believe, or having reasonable cause to believe, that sexual abuse of a minor [or vulnerable adult] has occurred after reviewing available relevant information, and consultation with the Lay Person Review Board (cf. *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young Adults*, Article 2). Since our ministry of Safe Environment is concerned with transparency, a lower threshold is and shall be the chosen standard for disclosure. In other words, “*Would the average person consider the allegation believable?*” Accordingly, a “credible accusation” is not to be considered a legal determination that the allegation has been proven beyond a reasonable doubt or by a preponderance of the evidence.

Lay Person Review Board: a panel of people that functions as a consultative body to the bishop/eparch. The board offers advice to the bishop/eparch to help him assess allegations of sexual abuse of minors (and vulnerable adults), and to determine a cleric's suitability for ministry.

Minor: a person under the age of eighteen (18) years.

Safe Environment: term used to refer to a structured protocol that contributes to preventing child abuse.

Sexual Abuse of a Minor: contact or interaction between a minor and an adult when the minor is being used for sexual stimulation of the adult. This occurs when an adult engages a minor in any sexual activity. (cf., <http://www.vatican.va/resources>.)

Vulnerable Adult: a person who habitually lacks the use of reason is to be considered equivalent to a minor. (Norms on *Delicta Graviora*, art. 6); a person who temporarily lacks the use of reason during an act of sexual abuse is also considered a vulnerable adult because that person is unable to give consent (Canon 125, §1).

On Friday, April 12, 2019, I will release a list of thirty-three (33) priests and four (4) deacons who have been credibly accused. Reporting of credible accusations will be an ongoing process of accountability and will further a change in attitude and approach. In other words, the future receipt and subsequent determination of any new credible allegation against a priest or deacon, living or deceased, will result in adding his name to the disclosure list. In fact, we have a reasonable hope that the disclosure list will be a catalyst for continued reporting of past or future instances of abuse.

Arriving at the disclosure list required the review of over 300,000 pages of material, including the files of 802 clerics, which included 623 priests and 179 deacons from the founding of the Diocese in 1918 to the present (2019). The review of the personnel files required over 700 hours of labor.

The entire project was tedious and required both dedication to our community and a loving concern for all children. Our entire Diocese is grateful to the conscientious and passionate lay volunteers who responded in committed discipleship to fulfill this important task.

The disclosure list of **Priests and Deacons with Credible Accusations of Sexual Abuse of a Minor or Vulnerable Adult** will be posted at <http://diolaf.org> on Friday, April 12, 2019. The disclosure list will include:

- The name of the alleged offender
- The year he was born
- The list of his assignments
- His current status, including the year he was removed from ministry

The inclusion of the names of some clergy may be for their family and friends a shock and a surprise. I deeply regret that this process may cause you pain and wonderment. Know that each case was treated seriously because, in all cases, lives and the good name of a person were at stake.

Religious clergy, that is, clergy who have been vowed members of religious communities of consecrated life, rather than the diocesan clergy, have not been included on our disclosure list because we believe that this is the purview of the particular religious community. For example, on December 7, 2018, the Jesuit Central and Southern Province (which includes the geographic territory of our Diocese) released its own disclosure list. Let me be clear that I will not accept for service in our Diocese any religious priest if there is any question about his suitability. We also require of them criminal background checks and Safe Environment Certification. Our zero tolerance policy applies to religious clergy as well. Indeed, if a religious is accused, mandatory reporting laws are followed. Then, if the accusation seems to be true, and in consultation with his Superior, he is placed on administrative leave until a final determination can be made by authorities and/or the religious congregation. The respective religious communities maintain the entire formation and ministerial history (personnel file) for each of its members.

If you have already reported sexual abuse by a priest or deacon, you may not see his name on the disclosure list. Be assured that your report was treated with the utmost seriousness and respect, but the standard for establishing credibility may not yet have been met. If you, or anyone, has further knowledge which would establish credibility, we implore you to please come forward to civil authorities and then to the Victims Assistance Coordinator (337.298.2987) or the Vicar General (337.261.5611).

Similarly, if you have not yet reported sexual abuse inflicted upon you when you were a minor or vulnerable adult, I encourage you to do so as well, first by contacting civil authorities, and then the Diocese. We have come to believe that involving law enforcement at the outset of an allegation is the most prudent thing to do.

Also, it is possible, though unlikely, that a priest or deacon was wrongly listed as credibly accused of sexually abusing a minor or vulnerable adult. If the Diocese receives substantial information that a claim was false or not credible, the name of that priest or deacon will be removed from the list, and an explanation about why his name was removed will be made known and we will do our best to restore his reputation. Further, the Diocese does not comment on matters regarding pending litigation.

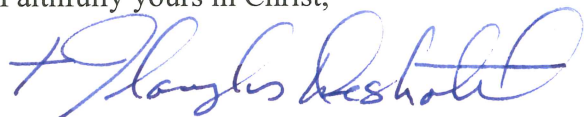
I sincerely acknowledge and appreciate the courage of those who have already come forward with accusations. Receiving each individual report was essential to ensuring the safety of others and to helping the Church publicly acknowledge its sins and errors. If during the course of reporting an accusation, a victim or individual felt as though he or she was not listened to with sincerity and respect, I humbly apologize for this irresponsible treatment.

While we must continually remain vigilant, it is important to state that the *Charter* protocols have been effective, and the statistics about the future are positive. Many agree that the quality of seminarians and seminary formation has not only improved but in most cases, is exceptional. Our many seminarians is a testimony to the strength and vibrancy of the Catholic faith in Acadiana. Our Safe Environment programs continue to equip our clergy and lay volunteers with the tools to recognize and report signs of abuse. For more information about the comprehensive nature of our program, please review the Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) document available at <http://diolaf.org> by clicking on "Finding Answers."

I ask that you offer a word of encouragement to the many faithful priests who are also deeply hurt by the sins of their brothers. Despite all that has happened, despite at times having been betrayed by the hierarchy, they continue to show up—at the altar, in the confessional, at the hospital, in the homes of the sick, preparing homilies, preaching and teaching the Word of God, in campus ministry, in classrooms, in prisons, in pastoral counseling, at various meetings, at the office, and for many long and sometimes stress-filled days. Their dedication to God's call continues.

Finally, and most importantly, on behalf of our entire Diocese, I offer our humble apology to victims of abuse and their families. The unjust agony they have experienced at the hands of a cleric, who has been ordained to serve, is heartbreaking and cries for justice. Our Diocese will continue to provide, to the best of our ability, the help they need to heal. Our Victims Assistance Coordinator stands ready to meet with victims and provide resources for pastoral care and counseling. I, along with many of the faithful, pray daily for those wounded by abuse. I repeat my promise to protect children and vulnerable adults by not allowing any ordained minister or volunteer guilty of abuse to serve in this Diocese. Through the intercession of the Holy Mother of God, may Almighty God grant us the graces necessary to fulfill this mission.

Faithfully yours in Christ,



Most Reverend J. Douglas Deshotel, D.D.
Bishop of the Diocese of Lafayette

JDD:mhb



Mrs. Maureen K. Fontenot, PHR, SHRM-CP
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